

THE POLICY COMMITTEE ROLE IN BUDGET MATTERS

Joint Rule 314 gives policy committees a formal role to play in the Legislature's development of a state budget.

Policy Committees Hold Joint Public Hearings with the Appropriations Committee

When the Governor submits a budget proposal to the Legislature, the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs usually schedules a public hearing on each of the subject areas affected by the proposal. The joint standing committee (policy committee) with jurisdiction over a particular subject matter hears that portion of the bill jointly with the Appropriations Committee. Generally, the policy committee is seated at tables in front of the Appropriations committee members and participates in the public hearing through the Appropriations Committee chair. This provides the committee with the opportunity to hear the same information as the Appropriations Committee and to question agency heads about the proposed budget.

Policy Committees Hold Work Sessions and Make Recommendations

After the public hearing with the Appropriations Committee, the policy committees generally have work sessions on their own to consider the portion of the budget bill relevant to their subject. The policy committee may ask representatives of the departments affected to attend the work session to answer questions or to provide additional information.

Joint Rule 314 requires each policy committee to provide the Appropriations Committee with its recommendations on the relevant part(s) of the budget proposal. The chairs of the Appropriations Committee, after consultation with the chairs of the policy committees, establish a schedule for the policy committees to report back; the chairs of the Appropriations Committee also set budgetary constraints and other guidance for policy committee reports.

The policy committee is required to submit a recommendation within the budgetary constraints set by the Appropriations Committee. The Joint Rule allows the policy committee subsequently to recommend additional funds for program priorities that exceed the original budgetary constraints, provided the committee explains its rationale for such recommendations.

The Appropriations Committee chairs provide guidance on the method of reporting back to the committee. Generally, a policy committee has the option of sending its budget subcommittee to meet with the Appropriations Committee or to send a letter conveying the policy committee's recommendations. Policy committee recommendations are advisory and are not binding on the Appropriations Committee.

Policy Committees Appoint Budget Subcommittees

Each policy committee is required to appoint a budget subcommittee to serve as liaison to the Appropriations Committee. Subcommittees consist of between 3 and 5 committee members. Joint Rule 314 sets forth guidance on how the members are appointed and requires that the policy committee report the membership to the Appropriations Committee. The Appropriations Committee notifies the policy committee chairs and the subcommittee chair when the Appropriations Committee will be considering parts of the budget relevant to that policy committee.

Policy Committees Prioritize Committee Bills with Fiscal Impact

In addition to advising the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's budget proposals, each policy committee is required to advise the Appropriations Committee on the policy committee's priorities among bills that have a fiscal impact. Joint Rule 314 requires each policy committee to report its priorities to the Appropriations Committee within 5 days after reporting out its last bill with fiscal impact. Staff can provide each committee with a list of bills that are still "alive" in the legislative process and that are considered to have a fiscal impact. Committees use different methods to determine and report their priorities to Appropriations. Policy committee priorities help the Appropriations Committee determine which bills to fund in the final budgeting process.

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